



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Belarus**

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
February 13, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We reviewed with interest the press release that emerged from the recent visit of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Working Group on Belarus to assess progress on the four criteria on democratization which were established by the Parliamentary Assembly Troika in 2001.

The purpose of the visit, which was their first this year, was to assess the progress made on the four criteria including election legislation, strengthened functions for the Parliament, media freedom, and non-harassment of opposition figures.

As was indicated in their press release the Working Group met with government officials and opposition party representatives as well as with family members of those who have disappeared and been imprisoned in circumstances that are widely believed to be politically motivated.

On the positive side, the delegation welcomed the restoration of the OSCE's presence and the appointment of Ambassador Heyken and expressed the wish that we are now embarked on a stage where a spirit of cooperation will prevail.

Unfortunately, despite its positive, open disposition to Belarus, the Working Group also concluded, that the election legislation has not been amended to reflect recommendations made previously by international organizations and that the opposition party representatives also do not appear to be adequately represented in the electoral commissions.

We share the Working Group's disappointment that Belarus has not implemented recommendations on electoral legislation. We also consider it unfortunate, as the committee did that opposition party representatives are not adequately represented on the electoral commissions, and that a significant number of opposition candidates have been denied registration for what appeared to be minor violations. This lack of participation by the opposition undermines the legitimacy of the elections.

Time is short, Mr. Chairman, in the run up to the March 2 local elections. We join the Working Group in urging that Belarus dedicate itself in the time remaining to addressing the most immediate deficiencies in the areas of early voting, mobile voting, and the framework for domestic observation. Such improvements would mark a significant step forward.

Also as the Working Group notes, there are few signs that Belarusians have indeed embarked upon a genuine process of democratization. However, the restoration of the OSCE's presence represents an opportunity to forge meaningful progress. We support cooperation with the OSCE Office in Belarus and with ODIHR in tackling recommendations to improve the

climate for genuine, democratic elections that can be recognized by the international community in the future.

Thank you.